

164th Theater Airfield Operations Group Deploys for the Middle East

Twenty one Soldiers and one civilian made history June 6, 2007 as they boarded a bus outside of Fort Rucker's Air Traffic Services Command (ATSCOM) Headquarters destined for the Middle East. The early morning departure marked the first deployment of the 164th Theater Airfield Operations Group (TAOG), a unit activated just one month ago.

"This is a small package, but we are going to be doing big work," Col. Jerry L. Egbert, commander of the 164th TAOG, said as he addressed his troops.

During their anticipated 15-month deployment, the 164th TAOG team will be responsible for improving Army airfields, assisting Army air traffic controllers, and providing general oversight of airfield operations in Iraq and Kuwait, according to Maj. Bart Tragemann, the unit's operations officer.

"These are very experienced air traffic services controllers and maintenance technicians and they have been doing their jobs (for a long time)," he said. "(We are going to) integrate, educate, and make the (deployed air traffic services) community...stronger."

Tragemann said that the greatest challenge facing his unit, as they head into the deployment, is its age. Because they are a new unit, Tragemann said his team is going to have to work to "educate" the air traffic services community about what they can bring to the fight.

"We are going to have to expose the Army to the unit's capabilities," he said.

At the unit's May 2 activation ceremony, Lt. Gen. Joseph F. Peterson, U.S. Army Forces Command deputy commanding general, said the new unit was composed of Soldiers who are trained to the highest standards and will reinforce full-spectrum operations in support of America's interests.

Tragemann said the Soldiers he will be serving with during the deployment are indeed trained and ready to accomplish any mission they receive.

"We know what our mission is, we are ready for it and we are ready to make (the air traffic services community) better over there," he said.

Spc. Reagan Paule, an air traffic controller, was excited to deploy with the new unit. Paule, who arrived at Fort Rucker from a year in Korea just two months ago, volunteered to deploy with the 164th in the place of another Soldier who only recently returned from Iraq.



"This makes me feel like I've earned my uniform," Paule said. "This gives me a right to support what our Nation gives us."

Prior to the Soldiers boarding the bus June 6, Egbert offered his thanks to the community and noted that he would never be more than an e-mail away if anyone needed anything.

Following Egbert's remarks, the bus' engine roared to life signaling to the families and friends gathered that it was time to say their last goodbyes to their Soldiers.

As the bus prepared to pull away, Dolores De Jesus reached up and traced a heart on the window of the bus where her husband, Staff Sgt. Leonard De Jesus was sitting. Dolores said while the next 15 months will certainly present challenges, her family's faith will carry them through.